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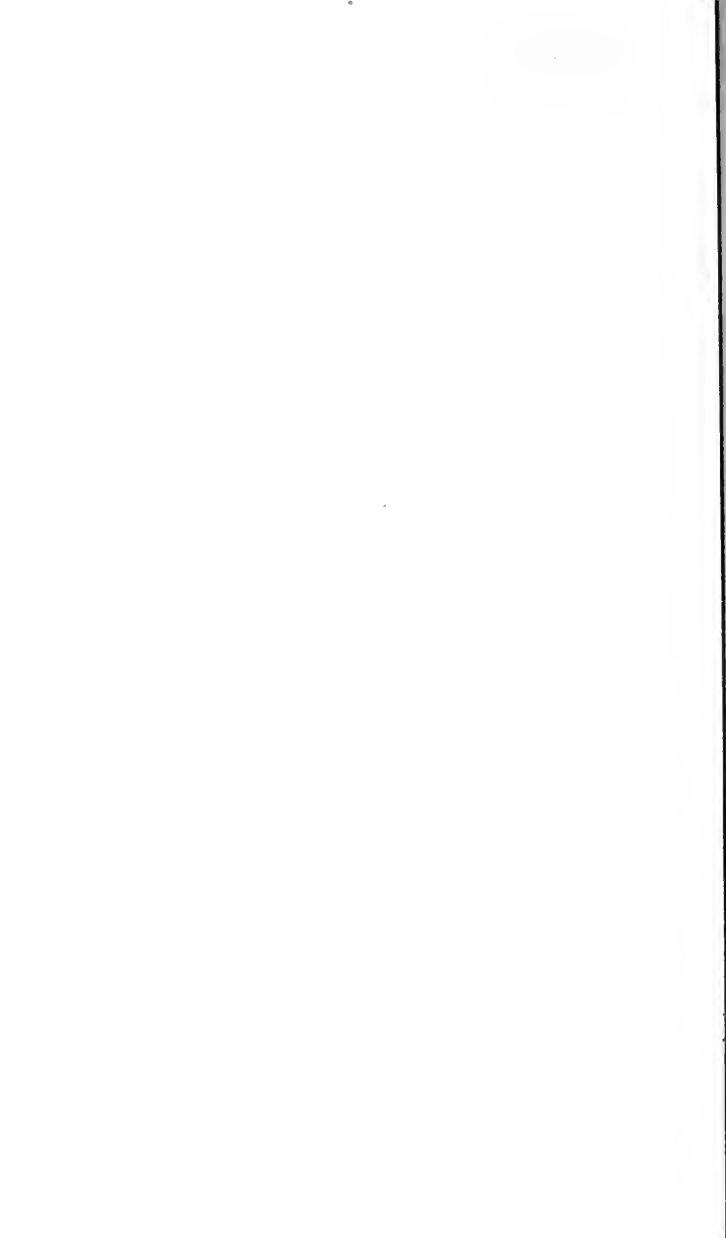
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May June Thompson

THE ALCESTIS

OF

EURIPIDES.

RENDERED INTO ENGLISH VERSE.

BY

WM. CUDWORTH, M. INST. C.E.

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THE ALCESTIS OF EURIPIDES.



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ALCESTIS.

APOLLO.

O, dwelling of Admetus, where I bore
A menial's lot, although I am a god !
Zeus was the cause, who having slain my son
Asclepius, hurling lightning at his breast,
I was enraged, and slew the Cyclopes,
The forgers of the awful fire of Zeus.
For this the father forced me to atone,
And serve a mortal man in menial guise.
And coming to this land, I watched the herds
For him who entertained me, and preserved
His house unto this day ; and being myself
Pious, I chanced to find a pious man,
The son of Pheres, whom I saved from death,
The fates beguiling. And the goddesses
Granted me that Admetus should escape
The death impending, giving in exchange
Another victim to the powers beneath.

And when he'd proved, and gone through all his friends,
His aged sire, and her who gave him birth,
He found not anyone except his wife
Willing to die for him, and see no more
The light of day. Who now within the house
Is lying in his arms, and gasping out
Her soul ; for on this day, it is decreed
That she must die, and pass away from life.
And lest pollution find me in this house
I leave the roof of this beloved abode.
Already do I see stern Death at hand,
Priest of the dying, who will presently
Lead her below to Hades' dark abodes.
And at the fated time he shows himself,
Watching for this sad day wherein 'twas fixed
That she must die.

DEATH.

Ah ! art thou here ? What dost thou in these halls ?
Why, Phœbus, dost thou linger in this place ?
Again thou dost me wrong by bearing off,
And making cease the rights and honours due
To the great powers below. Was't not enough
To thwart me in Admetus' day of doom,
Frustrating by thy craft the destinies ?
And now again, thou art watching over her
With bow in hand, who for her husband's life
Promised herself to die, the daughter fair
Of Pelias.

APOLLO.

Fear not, I have justice both
And solid reasons.

DEATH.

What need then for bow
If thou hast justice ?

APOLLO.

'Tis my usual way
To bear it with me.

DEATH.

Aye, and beyond right
To benefit this house.

APOLLO.

For I do grieve
For the misfortunes of the man I love.

DEATH.

And wilt thou rob me of this second corpse ?

APOLLO.

Nay, I did not take e'en the former one
By force.

DEATH.

How then is he upon the earth,
And not below the ground ?

APOLLO.

By, for himself
Giving his wife whom now thou com'st to seek.

DEATH.

Aye, and I'll take her to the lands below.

APOLLO.

Take her and go, for 'tis not in my power
To move thee.

DEATH.

To slay him whose hour has come,
This is my office.

APOLLO.

Nay, but to strike down
Those who are meet for death.

DEATH.

I understand
Thy meaning and good wishes.

APOLLO.

Can it be
Alcestis may arrive at good old age?

DEATH.

It cannot be, for I must also have
My rights and honours.

APOLLO.

Surely thou'lt not take
More than one life.

DEATH.

But when the youthful die
I have the greater honour.

APOLLO.

But if age
Come on her ere she die, her funeral rites
Will be the richer.

DEATH.

Phœbus, what thou says't
Is a law for the rich.

APOLLO.

How say'st thou ? Art
Thou witty inadvertently ?

DEATH.

The rich
Would buy the privilege of dying old.

APOLLO.

Doth it not please thee then to grant to me
This favour ?

DEATH.

No, indeed, thou knowest well
My turn of mind.

APOLLO.

Oh, yes ! to mortals hateful
And loathèd by the gods.

DEATH.

Thou cans't not have
All things, and hast no right to.

APOLLO.

Assuredly
Thou shalt desist, relentless though thou art.
To Pheres' house a certain man will come
Sent by Eurystheus from the stormy land
Of Thrace, in quest of horses and a car,

Who in Admetus' hall, received as guest
Shall rescue from thee his devoted wife
By putting forth his might, nor shalt thou have
Our thanks, and yet thou'lt do it all the same,
And shalt be hated by me.

DEATH

Pleading much
Thou shalt get nothing more. The woman then
Shall go below to Hades' dwelling place.
And now I go to her, that with my sword
I may begin the customary rites,
For sacred is he to the gods below
Whose locks are severed by my fateful blade.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

What means this death-like stillness in the house?
Why are all silent in Admetus' hall?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

There is no friendly voice at hand to tell
Whether 'tis ours to mourn a queen deceased,
Or Pelias' child, Alcestis still survives,
And sees the light of day, to me and all
Seeming to be the best and noblest wife
Toward her own husband.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Heareth any one
Groaning, or beat of hands within the house,

Or lamentation, as if all were done ?
But not a single one of all their men
Is standing at the gates. O, Pœan, show,
Show thyself midst our waves of misery !

SEMI-CHORUS II.

They would not be all silent were she dead—

SEMI-CHORUS I.

At least she is not taken from the house
For burial.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Why? I do not comprehend.
Wherefore so sure?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

How could Admetus give
His chaste wife burial with no one nigh?

SEMI-CHORUS II.

Before the gates I see no lustral bowl,
With water from the fountain, as is wont,
When one has passed away, and no shorn lock
Hangs in the vestibule, which ever falls
In mourning for the dead ; no youthful hands
Of women send forth their resounding beat.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

And yet this is indeed the appointed day.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

What's this thou sayest ?

SEMI-CHORUS I.

On which it is her doom
To go beneath the earth.

SEMI-CHORUS II.

That touches close
My mind and soul.

SEMI-CHORUS I.

Aye! when the good depart
Grief well becomes the man of upright heart.

CHORUS.

But there's no spot of earth where voyaging,
Not Lycia, nor great Ammon's thirsty plains
One might release the unhappy lady's soul
From death's stern grasp. Untimely fate's at hand
And at the altars of the mighty gods
No priest have I to whom I can resort.
If Phoebus' son were only with his eyes
Looking upon this light, she would have come,
Leaving the lands of darkness and the gates
Of Hades; for he used to raise the dead
Before the bolt of Zeus's lightning flame
Struck him; but now what hope can I admit
Of life for her? For all has now been tried
By princes, and the altars of the gods
Are filled with bleeding offerings, and there is
No help for these misfortunes. But here comes

A woman servant from the house, all tears.
What fortune shall I hear? To mourn, indeed,
If to our lords there happen ought of ill,
Is to be pardoned ; but we now would know
Whether our lady yet survives, or fate
Has overcome her.

WOMAN SERVANT.

You may speak of her
As living and as dead.

CHORUS.

And how can one
Both die and see the light?

WOMAN SERVANT.

This very hour
She droops and gasps her soul out.

CHORUS.

Wretched man,
Such as thou art, O what a wife thou'lt miss !

WOMAN SERVANT.

My master knows not yet before he's lost her.

CHORUS.

Is there no longer hope to save her life?

WOMAN SERVANT.

No, for the destined day is pressing on her.

CHORUS.

Are not the accustomed rites, then, done for her?

WOMAN SERVANT.

The shroud is ready and her husband soon
Will lay her in the tomb.

CHORUS.

Now let her know
She'll die with fair renown, the noblest wife
By far of those who dwell beneath the sun.

WOMAN SERVANT.

Why not the best? Can any one gainsay?
What must the wife be who surpasses her!
How could she reverence her husband more
Than by the offering of her life for his?
And this, indeed, does all the city know;
But what she did within the palace walls
Hearing, you'll marvel at. For when she saw
The appointed day was come she went and bathed
Her fair skin in pure water from the stream,
And taking from her cedar chest her robe
And decorations, she adorned herself
Becomingly, and, standing at the hearth,
She prayed, "O mistress (for I go beneath
The earth) I fall before thee and entreat
With latest breath, that thou wilt guard and keep
My orphan children, and unite with one
A loving wife, and to the other give
A noble husband, and O let them not

Like me depart this earth before their time,
But let them in prosperity complete
A life of blessing in their fatherland.
And all the altars in Admetus' house
She crowned with garlands, offering up her prayers,
Stripping the leaves off from the myrtle boughs,
Without a tear or sigh, nor did the fate
That was impending change the blooming tint
Of her fair skin ; and rushing then within
Her chamber to her bed, she there, indeed,
Melted in tears, and thus bemoaned herself :—
“ O couch, where I gave up my maidenhood
For this man's sake, for whom I go to die,
Farewell, I do not hate thee, me alone
Thou hast destroyed, declining to be false
To thee and to my husband, now I die.
Some other woman will possess thee soon ;
She cannot be more chaste, but may perchance
Have better fortune.” Throwing herself down
She kissed, and kissed it, moistening all the bed
With the soft flood that streamed forth from her eyes.
And when she had found satiety of tears,
She went forth drooping, rushing from the couch,
And often, as she went she turned again
Back to her chamber, and again she threw
Herself upon the bed. Her children there
Clung to their mother's robes, dissolved in grief,

And she, embracing in her arms, now one
And then the other, as at point of death,
Bade them adieu. And all her maidens wept
Beneath the roof, lamenting her sad lot.
But she to each extended her right hand,
And no one was too mean for her to greet
With parting words, and make to her response.
Such are the woes within Admetus' house.
And had *he* died, he would have been no more,
But shunning that, he meets with such a grief
As he will ne'er forget.

CHORUS.

Is not Admetus mourning mid these woes,
Since it must be that he shall be deprived
Of such a virtuous wife?

WOMAN SERVANT.

He weeps, indeed,
Holding his dear wife in his arms, and begs
She will not leave him, vainly asking for
What cannot be; for she does fade away
And waste with sickness, lying all unstrung,
A burden in his arms; but still though few
Her moments, she would look upon the sun,
As never more, but now for the last time
She should behold his rays. But I will go
And intimate your presence, for not all
Are well affected towards those over them,

So as to stand by them when evil comes.
But you are ancient well-beloved friends
Of these our rulers.

CHORUS I.

Oh, Zeus! In what way can there be resource
Amidst our evils, and what end is there
Of mischief to our lords?

CHORUS II.

Will any one
Come forth, or shall I now cut off my locks
And throw around me the dark mourning robes?

CHORUS III.

'Tis clear, indeed, my friends, 'tis clear, and yet
Let us pray to the gods, the mighty ones.

CHORUS IV.

Oh Pæan, king, some remedy find out
For the sad fortunes of Admetus' house!

CHORUS V.

Provide it, oh provide, for once before
Thou didst discover one for him, and now
Be the deliverer of her from death,
And silence murderous Hades' stern demands!

Strophe.

Woe, woe, alas! woe, woe, alas, alas!

Antistrophe.

Oh son of Pheres, what a deed thou'st done
Which strips thee of thy wife!

CHORUS VI.

Is't not, indeed,
Worthy of self-destruction, and enough
To cause thee bring thy neck within a noose
Hung from aloft?

CHORUS VII.

Yes, surely, for thou'lt see
Thy wife not merely loved, but most beloved,
Dying upon this day.

CHORUS VIII.

Behold, behold!
She and her husband now are coming forth
Out of the house.

CHORUS IX.

Cry out, and make lament,
O land of Pheræ, for the best of wives
Fading with sad disease beneath the earth
For Hades, ruler of the lands below.

CHORUS.

Ne'er will I say that marriage gives more joy
Than grief, concluding so from former signs,
And from this wretched fortune of our king
Who, losing on this day the best of wives,
Shall live a life not worth the living then.

ALCESTIS.

O sun, and light of day, and fleeting clouds
Of heaven !

ADMETUS.

They look upon both thee and me,
Two souls in evil case, who nought have done
Against the gods for which they ought to die.

ALCESTIS.

O land, and palace roofs, and bridal bed,
Where once I dwelt in Iolcos !

ADMETUS.

Raise thyself
Unhappy one, oh leave me not, and pray
The mighty gods above to pity us.

ALCESTIS.

I see the two-oared boat, and Charon stands,
Ferryman of the dead, with pole in hand,
And summons me e'en now. "Why tarriest thou?
Speed on, thou stoppest us!" and pressing thus
He hastens me.

ADMETUS.

Ah me! for me thou tak'st
This bitter voyage, O ill-fated one!
What we do suffer !

ALCESTIS.

Some one leads me on,
Leads me (O seest thou not?) to the abodes
Where throng the dead, winged Hades darting forth
Glances from 'neath his eyebrows dark as night.

What doest thou? Let me go! Oh, what a way
Is that which I, most wretched one, must go!

ADMETUS.

A sad one for thy friends, but most of all
For me and for our children, for with them
I have a common grief.

ALCESTIS.

Oh, let me go!

Let me go now! No strength is in my feet.
Let me lie down, for death is near, and o'er
My eyes creeps dusky night; my children dear,
My children, ye are henceforth motherless;
May ye fare well, and look upon the light.

ADMETUS.

Ah me! I hear these words more sad to me
Than any death. O do not have the heart,
I pray thee by the gods, to go from me,
And by our children whom thou'lt leave behind
Orphans, but bear up still! For when thou'rt dead
'Twill be all o'er with me, for we in thee
Both live and do not live; so much do we
Value thy tender love.

ALCESTIS.

Admetus, how

Things are with me, thou seest; I wish to say
Some words that burden me before I die.

I, honouring thee, and thinking it was meet
To give my life that thou may'st see the light,
Die ;—though 'twas in my power not to die
For thee, but have for husband him I would
Among Thessalians, and to rule a house
Honoured with regal power, but not e'en so
Would I live with my children, torn from thee.
Nor did I spare myself, though having gifts
Of youth in which I ever took delight ;
And yet he who begat, and she who bare thee
Forsook thee, though they'd reached the term of life
When death comes well, and well it would have been
To save their son, and die a glorious death.
Thou wast their only son, nor had they hope
When thou wast gone to have another child.
And I should have lived on, and thou thyself
The common term of life, and thou wouldst not
Have mourned thy deprivation of thy wife,
And childrens' orphanage. Be sure some god
Hath wrought this, and is bringing it to pass.
Well, be it so ! Think thou on me for this
With gratitude, for never shall I ask
Their real worth from thee, for there is nought
More precious than one's life ; but what is just,
(As thou'lt admit) I ask, for thou dost love
These children as I love them, and no less,
If thou dost think aright. Make them the lords

Over my house, and go not thou and wed,
Bringing a stepmother to trouble them ;
A woman my inferior, who in spite
Will lay a heavy load on those whom thou
And I gave birth to. Do not this indeed,
I beg of thee, for she who takes the place
Of former wife, is to her children nought
More gentle than a viper. He, the boy
Has in his father a great tower of strength,
And may hold converse with him in his need ;
But thou, my daughter, how wilt thou pass through
Thy maidenhood with honour, finding such
A yoke-mate to thy father? 'Tis my fear
She'll throw some base aspersion on thy name,
And mar thy marriage in the prime of youth.
For never will thy mother give thee out
In marriage, nor encourage thee, my child,
When in the throes of childbirth, at thy side,
Where nothing comforts more than mother's love.
I needs must die, and not to morrow comes
This evil, nor the third day of the month,
But straightway I'll be numbered among those
Who are no more. Farewell, may ye enjoy
Prosperity, and you may make the boast,
My husband, that thou had'st the best of wives,
And you, my children, that you had your birth
From a good mother.

CHORUS.

Fear not, for I dare
To vouch for him he'll do as thou dost say
If he be left with ordinary sense.

ADMETUS

It shall be so, fear not, for I enjoyed
Thee living, and when dead, thou only shalt
Be called my wife, and no Thessalian maid
Shall claim me husband in the place of thee.
No woman comes of such a high-born sire,
Nor rivals thee in comeliness of form.
I pray the gods that from my children dear
Much joy may be in store, for soon from thee
We have no more, and I shall mourn for thee
Not for a year alone, but long as life
Shall last, my wife, with loathing in my heart
For her who bore me, hating, too, my sire.
For they in words were friendly, not in deeds.
But thou hast saved me, giving for my life
All that was dearest to thee. Have I not
Great cause for grief in losing such a mate?
But I will put a stop to revellers
And groups of banqueters, and wreaths and song,
Which used to fill my house. For never more
Will I put hand to lyre, or stir my soul
To sing to Lybian lute, for thou hast ta'en
All my delight in life ; but thy loved form,

Fashioned by skilful artists, shall be stretched
Upon our bed, and I will fall on it,
Clasping it in my arms, and calling it
By thy loved name, shall think I have a wife
In my embrace, although I have her not.
Cold comfort surely, yet I think 'twill lift
Some weight from off my soul. And coming oft
To see me in my dreams, thou'lt give me joy ;
For sweet is it to see e'en in the night
The friend we love as long as he remains.
But if the tongue of Orpheus had been mine,
And song, so that appeasing with my strains
Demeter's daughter or her husband, I
Might rescue thee from Hades, I would go
Beneath, and not dark Pluto's dog, nor yet
Charon, the ferryman of souls, who sits
With oar in hand, would check my ardent course,
Before I would bring back thy life to light.
But if it can't be so, expect me there
When I shall die, and an abode provide
As if to live with me ; for I will bid
Them place me by thee in the same sad home
Of cedar-wood, and lay me by thy side ;
For not when dead e'en will I bear to be
Apart from thee my only faithful one.

CHORUS.

And surely I will share with thee thy grief
As friend with friend, for great is her desert.

ALCESTIS.

O children, ye yourselves have heard the vow
Your father's made, that he will never take
Another wife to lord it over you,
Nor to dishonour me.

ADMETUS.

And now indeed,
I promise, and will keep all that I've said.

ALCESTIS.

Then receive thou my children from my hand.

ADMETUS.

I take them, a dear gift from a loved hand.

ALCESTIS.

Now, to my children fill a mother's part.

ADMETUS.

Yes, for there's need when they are stripped of thee.

ALCESTIS.

My children, when 'twas meet that I should live,
I go beneath the earth.

ADMETUS.

What shall I do,
Alas, bereft of thee?

ALCESTIS.

But time will heal ;
He who is dead is nothing.

ADMETUS.

By the gods,
Take me below, O take me !

ALCESTIS.

We suffice
Who die for thee.

ADMETUS.

O doom, of what a mate
Thou dost deprive me !

ALCESTIS.

And my eye, in truth,
Darkness makes heavy.

ADMETUS.

I am all undone,
My wife, if thou wilt leave me.

ALCESTIS.

Thou may'st speak
Of me as being no more anything.

ADMETUS.

Lift up thy countenance, O do not leave
Thy children.

ALCESTIS.

Most unwillingly forsooth,
But farewell, O my children.

ADMETUS.

Look on them,
O look !

ALCESTIS.

I am no longer anything.

ADMETUS.

What has come o'er thee? Art thou leaving us?

ALCESTIS.

Farewell.

ADMETUS.

I am undone, O wretched me!

CHORUS.

She's gone, Admetus' wife no longer is.

EUMELUS.

Woe's me, my mother hath gone down below
In truth, my father, and no longer lives
Beneath the sun, and wretched, leaving me,
Hath orphanized my life, for see, O see
Her eyelid, and her arms stretched by her side!
Hear me, my mother, hear me I beseech,
I call upon thee, mother, now I call,
Falling upon thy lips, thine only son.

ADMETUS.

Thou call'st on one who neither hears nor sees,
So I and you are struck down to the earth
With a most heavy stroke.

EUMELUS.

I, in my youth,

O father, am deserted and bereft

Of my dear mother, I, who have endured
Most cruel wrongs, and thou, too, sister mine,
Thou, too, hast suffered with me. Father, thou
In vain, in vain hast married, nor hast reached
Old age along with her ; for she has gone
Before thee, and the house bereft of her
Is gone to ruin.

CHORUS.

These calamities,
Admetus, thou must bear, thou'rt not the first
Or last of mortals who has lost a wife
Famed for her virtue, but remember that
The debt of dying must be paid by all.

ADMETUS.

I know it, and not suddenly this ill
Has fallen on me, knowing it some time,
It has much worn me ; but enough of this ;
I will perform the burial of my dead,
And do ye stay with me and chant again
Responsively the pæan to the god
Implacable below. And I will bid
All the Thessalians o'er whom I rule
To share my grief for her with severed hair,
And mourning robes of black ; and ye who yoke
To four-horse chariots the single steed,
Cut with your steel the adorning of their necks.

And in the city let there be no sound
Of lute or lyre till twelve returning moons
Have run their course ; for no one shall I lay
In the cold tomb more dear to me, or more
Deserving. She is worthy of my most
Exalted estimation, for alone
She dared to die for me.

CHORUS.

O Pelias' child,

Mayst thou, not faring badly, occupy
Thy sunless house in Hades' dark abode !
And let the black-haired god who rules below,
Know, and the ancient man with hand on oar,
Ferryman of the dead, he has conveyed
Far, far the noblest woman o'er the lake
Of Acheron in his two oarèd boat.
Often shall minstrels sing of thee upon
The seven-stringed mountain lyre, and hymn thy praise
Without the lyre in Sparta, when the time
Of the Carnean month comes circling round,
And the moon, high in heaven, shines all night through,
In bright and happy Athens : such a theme
For song thou'st, dying, left for minstrelsy.
Would it were with me, and I had the power
To bring thee to the light from Hades' halls,
And dark Cocytus' streams, with help of oar,
That plies the waters of the realm below.

For thou alone, O best of woman-kind,
Hast dared to save thy husband from the land
Of Hades, giving in exchange thy life.
May the earth, lady, lightly fall on thee,
And if thy husband some new bed should choose,
Assuredly shall he be odious
To me, and to thy children. For when she
Thy mother would not hide her form beneath
The ground, nor yet thy venerable sire,
Who gave thee to the light, and did not dare,
Obdurate ones, to save their wretched son,
Although their locks were hoary, thou in bloom
Of youth hast gone to give thy life for his.
O may it be my lot myself to win
Such a dear wedded wife, for chance like this
Is rare in life, for she would live with me
On to life's end, and give no cause for pain.

HERACLES.

Strangers, who in this land of Pheræ dwell,
Say, shall I find Admetus in the house?

CHORUS.

The son of Pheres is within the house,
O Heracles, but say what business brings
Thee to the land of Thessaly and this
Pheræan city.

HERACLES.

For Eurystheus, he
Who dwells in Tiryns, I have work to do.

CHORUS.

And whither goest thou? What roaming quest
Hast thou been yoked to?

HERACLES.

I go forth to seek
The four-horsed car of Thracian Diomed.

CHORUS.

How then wilt thou be able? Hast thou no
Experience with the stranger?

HERACLES.

None at all,
I've not yet come to the Bistonian land.

CHORUS.

Thou wilt not get possession of the steeds
Without a fight.

HERACLES.

But neither can I shirk
These labours.

CHORUS.

Slaying him thou'lt come away
Again, or being slain, thou'lt there remain.

HERACLES.

It will not be the first race that I've run.

CHORUS.

But mastering their lord, what wilt thou gain?

HERACLES.

I shall bear off the steeds for him who rules
In Tiryns.

CHORUS.

It will be no easy task
To bridle them.

HERACLES.

Yes, if they breathe not fire
Out of their nostrils.

CHORUS.

But they worry men
With ravenous jaws.

HERACLES.

Thou speak'st as if they ate
The food of wild beasts, not what horses eat.

CHORUS

Yet thou wilt see their mangers foul with blood.

HERACLES.

But of what sire does he who bred them boast
Himself the son?

CHORUS.

Of Ares; him who owns
The golden Thracian target.

HERACLES.

And in this
Thou mentionest a toil of my hard lot,
For it is ever harsh and uphill work

If I must meet in fight the sons begot
By Ares, first of all with Lycaon,
And then again with Cynus, and now last
I come to this third struggle with the steeds,
And with their lord ; but no one e'er shall see
The offspring of Alcmene trembling stand
Before his foes.

CHORUS.

And here, indeed, comes forth
Admetus, this land's ruler, from the house.

ADMETUS.

Hail to thee, son of Zeus, of Perseus' blood !

HERACLES.

Hail to *thee*, too, Admetus, who art lord
Of Thessaly !

ADMETUS.

I would that it *were* well
With me, but I do know thy friendliness.

HERACLES.

What cause is it that makes thee singular
With hair all shorn for grief ?

ADMETUS.

It is my work
This day to bury one who is no more.

HERACLES.

May this affliction not have lighted on
Thy children !

ADMETUS.

Those whom I begat are now
Alive within the house.

HERACLES.

Thy sire, indeed,
Hath reached a ripe old age, if *he* be gone.

ADMETUS.

He too exists, my friend, and she who bare me.

HERACLES.

Surely thy *wife*, Admetus, is not dead !

ADMETUS.

I have a two-fold tale concerning her.

HERACLES.

Speak'st thou of her as dead, or living still ?

ADMETUS.

She *is*, and is *no more*, and hence my grief.

HERACLES.

I am no wiser, for thou speak'st not plain.

ADMETUS.

Know'st thou not her sad fate which must befall ?

HERACLES.

I know she gave her life instead of thine.

ADMETUS.

How doth she live, then, having promised this ?

HERACLES.

Ah ! weep not for thy wife before the time.

ADMETUS.

One doomed to die is dead, the dead is nought.

HERACLES.

To be, and not to be, two things are deemed.

ADMETUS.

Thy thoughts run this way, Heracles, mine that.

HERACLES.

Why weep'st thou then ? what friend of thine is dead ?

ADMETUS.

A woman ; as I said a while ago.

HERACLES.

A stranger, or some one akin to thee ?

ADMETUS.

A stranger, but connected with my house.

HERACLES.

How has she lost her life, then, in thy house ?

ADMETUS.

Her father dying, here she spent her life
Of orphanhood.

HERACLES.

Alas ! would we had found
Thee sorrowing not, Admetus !

ADMETUS.

What, indeed,
Is thy intent in patching up this speech?

HERACLES.

I will go to another stranger's hearth.

ADMETUS.

Not so, O prince, let not such ill befall!

HERACLES.

A guest is troublesome to those who mourn.

ADMETUS.

The dead are dead. But go into the house.

HERACLES.

'Tis mean to feast 'mid friends whose grief is full.

ADMETUS.

Guest-rooms there are apart for thee to use.

HERACLES.

Excuse me, and I'll give a thousand thanks.

ADMETUS.

Thou must not leave me for another's hearth;

(*To a Servant.*)

Lead *thou* the way, and open out the rooms
That are apart from others in the house,
And say to those in charge that they set out
A right abundant table, and close thou
The doors that part the chambers from the court.
It ill beseems that guests who feast should hear
Groaning and lamentation for the dead.

CHORUS.

What doest thou? with such calamity
Impending, O Admetus, hast thou heart
To entertain a guest? Unfeeling man!

ADMETUS.

But if I'd driven from my house and town
A stranger who had come, wouldst thou the more
Have praised me? No indeed, for none the less
Would be my cause of woe, and I should be
More void of hospitality; besides,
To my misfortunes I should add this one,
To have my house called "no house for a guest."
And I myself have ever found this man
A liberal entertainer when I've gone
To his abode in Argos' thirsty land.

CHORUS.

How then hast thou concealed thy present case
When comes a man, thy friend, as thou thyself
Dost say?

ADMETUS.

He never would have come within
My house if he had known the loss I've had.
And I suspect in doing this, I seem
To him unwise, nor will he give me praise,
But my halls know not how to thrust away
Or cast dishonour on a stranger guest.

CHORUS.

O bountiful and hospitable house !
Thee did Apollo, minstrel of the lyre,
Deign to inhabit, and in thy abode,
He bore to be a feeder of the flocks,
Piping to them his shepherd songs athwart
The mountain slopes. To hear his pleasing strains
The spotted lynxes mingled with the flocks,
And blood-stained troops of lions left the dells
Of Othrys, and there danced around the lyre
The dappled fawn, O Phœbus, bounding on
With nimble foot beyond the lofty pines,
Delighting in thy song. So this man dwells
In flock-abounding home beside the lake
Of Bœbe's crystal waters, and he makes
The sky of the Molossians the bound
Of his ploughed acres and his stretching fields
Beside the dusky stable of the sun.
And Pelion owns his sway far as the shore
Washed by Ægæan waves, all harbourless.
And now with open doors will he receive
His guest with dewy eyes, fresh from his grief,
Over the body of his much-loved wife,
Just dead within the house. For noble souls
Have nicety of feeling ; and the good
Abound in wisdom ; and my mind is filled
With confidence that he who gives the gods
Due reverence will prosper in his ways.

ADMETUS.

Ye men of Pheræ, kindly present here,
Already do my people bear on high
My dead for burial, and the funeral pyre,
With all attendant rites ; but do ye, friends,
As is the custom, utter parting words
As lifeless she goes forth to come no more
Back to her home.

CHORUS.

And now, in truth, I see
Thy father coming on with aged foot,
And with him servants bearing in their hands
A rich robe for thy wife, a grateful gift
To those who go below.

PHERES.

I come, my son,
To suffer with thee in thy wretched lot ;
For thou hast lost, and no one will gainsay,
A noble wife of chaste and prudent heart.
But these things must be borne, hard though it be
To bear them ; and accept this burial robe
And let it go below. 'Tis meet the corpse
Of her who gave her life instead of thine,
My son, should have all honour, and me, too,
She's saved from childlessness, nor suffered me
Bereft of thee to waste away in grief
The remnant of my age, and having dared

A noble deed, hath made of woman's life
A thing for all her sex to glory in.
Thou who hast saved the life of this my son,
And raised us fallen ones, O, fare-thee-well,
And mayst thou prosper in the dark abodes
Of Hades. I affirm such marriages
Are for man's profit, else 'twere vain to wed.

ADMETUS.

Thou com'st not to this burial called by me,
Nor do I count thee 'mong my kindly friends ;
And ne'er shall she be shrouded in thy robe,
For in her burial nought of thine she needs.
Then was thy time for sympathy when I
Was doomed to perish, but thou stoodst aloof,
And, being aged, let another die,
A young man. Wilt thou now this corpse bewail ?
Thou wast not in reality my sire,
And she who says she bore me, and is called
My mother, bare me not, but secretly
From a slave's blood I at her breast was placed.
Put to the test, thou showest what thou art,
And I disclaim that I was born thy son.
Thou dost, indeed, surpass in cowardice,
Who, having come to such a stage of life,
So near its term, refusest, nor dost dare
To die to save thy son, but meanly left
For death this stranger woman, whom alone
I justly deem my mother and my sire.

And yet such courage would have honoured thee
Dying to save thy son, and short for thee
Is the remainder of thy time on earth ;
And I and she would have lived out our lives,
Nor should I, desolate; lament my loss.
But what, indeed, a happy man enjoys,
That has been thine, with kingly power thy youth
Was graced, and I thy son, was given to thee,
Heir to this house, that so thou should'st not leave
(Dying without a child), thy house a prey
To stranger ravages. Thou wilt not say
Forsooth, that I abandoned thee to die,
Dishonouring thy age ; I, who towards thee
Was most of all respectful, and for this,
Thou and the dame who bare me, gave such thanks.
Therefore thou canst not too soon set about
Begetting children, who will nurse thy age
And deck thee in thy death, and lay thee out ;
For with these hands I ne'er will bury thee.
Towards thee, indeed, I am already dead,
And if (some other offering his life),
I still behold the light, I'll say of such
I am his child, and loving cherisher
Of his old age. 'Tis not with honesty
That old men pray to die, and chide old age
And a long term of life, for if death comes
And faces them, not one would wish to die,
And age to them is burdensome no more.

CHORUS.

Cease, for sufficient is the present ill,
My son, nor seek to stir thy father's soul
To gusts of passion.

PHERES.

Whom presumest thou,
My son, to chase away with evil words?
Is it some Lydian or some Phrygian slave
Whom thou hast bought with money? Know'st thou not
I am Thessalian, of Thessalian sire,
Legitimately free? Thy insolence
Goes beyond bounds, and pelting me with words
Of youthful folly, thou shalt not escape,
Now thou hast done it. I begat thee heir
To my estate, and nourished thee, and yet
I do not own a debt to die for thee;
For 'tis no debt by fathers handed down,
Nor owned by Greeks, that fathers for their sons
Should give their lives. Thou for thyself wast born,
Whether unfortunate or fortunate,
And what was fitting thou hast had from me.
Thou rulest over much, and I will leave
To thee my ample many-acred fields;
For these descended to me from my sire.
In what then have I wronged thee? Or of what
Shall I deprive thee? Die thou not for me,
Nor I for thee; thou lov'st the light of day,

And deems't thou not thy father loves it too?
Surely I count the time beneath the earth
Endures for aye, and life above is short,
But yet 'tis sweet. Thou, then, most shamelessly
Strove *not* to die, and livest, and outstripp'st
Thy destiny, and gavest her to death.
Talkest thou then, of my unmanliness,
Thou meanest of mankind? who art outdone
By woman's daring who has died for thee,
Thou fine young man. And shrewdly hast thou found
A way to never die, if thou canst win
Wife after wife to die instead of thee.
And dost thou then, upbraid thy friends that they
Decline to do this, being base thyself?
Be silent, and remember, if *thou* lov'st
Thy own life, that each man's is dear to *him*.
But if thou speak'st reproachfully of me,
Thou shalt hear much that's evil of thyself,
And that not false.

CHORUS.

Both now and hitherto
Too many hard words have been bandied here;
But cease, old man, reviling this thy son.

ADMETUS.

Speak, seeing I have spoken, but to hear
The truth, if that doth grieve thee, 'twas not wise
To sin against me.

PHERES.

Had I died for thee
I should have erred yet more.

ADMETUS.

Is it the same
For a young man, and for the old to die?

PHERES.

Our business is to live one life, not two.

ADMETUS.

Thou wouldst, forsooth, have longer life than Zeus.

PHERES.

Dost thou then, curse thy parents, nought unjust
Enduring from them?

ADMETUS.

No, but I perceived
That a long life was dear to thee.

PHERES.

But say,
Art thou not bearing this one to the tomb
Instead of *thee*?

ADMETUS.

A proof, O basest man,
Of thy faint-heartedness.

PHERES.

'Twas not by me
She perished. *That* thou wilt not dare to say.

ADMETUS.

Ah ! would that some day thou may'st come to feel
Thy need of me !

PHERES.

Go, many women woo,
That more may die for thee.

ADMETUS.

That is to thee
A cause for shame who would not die for me.

PHERES.

This light of heaven is dear to me, is dear.

ADMETUS.

Thy soul's a coward's, not of manly mould.

PHERES.

Thou canst not chuckle, carrying to the tomb
My aged corpse.

ADMETUS.

Thy death, when it shall come,
Will be inglorious.

PHERES.

When I'm dead and gone,
Words of reproach will be of small account.

ADMETUS.

Alas ! how age is full of shamelessness !

PHERES.

She was not shameless, yet devoid of sense
Thou found'st her.

ADMETUS.

Go thy way, and suffer me
To bear my dead for burial.

PHERES.

I will go,
And thou, her murderer, wilt bury her,
But thou shalt yet to those akin to her
Give satisfaction due. Acastus, sure,
No longer lives if he shall fail to take
Vengeance upon thee for his sister's blood.

ADMETUS.

A plague on thee and her who lives with thee !
May ye grow old all childless, as is meet,
(Your son yet living) ! For ye shall not come
To this same roof that shelters me, at least.
And if it had been needful to disclaim
With voice of heralds the paternal hearth,
I would have done it. But now, let us go,
(For the sore ill before us must be borne),
And lay the corpse upon the funeral pyre.

CHORUS.

Alas, Alas ! unflinching one ! stout heart !
O noble soul, and brave beyond thy sex !
Farewell ! may Hermes in his place beneath,
And Hades welcome thee with kindness !
And if with them 'tis better for the good,
Mayst thou be bless'd, and take thy seat beside
The bride of Hades !

ATTENDANT.

Many have I known
Hitherto, coming out of every land
Guests to Admetus' house, for whom I've spread
An ample board, but never at this hearth
Have I received a baser one than this,
Who, seeing first my master full of grief,
Presumed to pass the gates and enter in.
And then he did not modestly accept
The entertainment, (having learnt our ills),
But if we did not bring the things he loved,
He called for them ; and taking in his hands
An ivy goblet, a huge draught he gulped
Of the dark mother's undiluted juice,
Until (the flame of wine pervading him),
He felt its warmth, and crowned his head with boughs
Stripped from the myrtle, and discordantly
He howled, and you might hear two different strains ;
For he was holding forth, regardless quite
Of all the suffering in Admetus' house,
And we, her servants, wept with heavy hearts
Our mistress gone, but no one showed our guest
Her dewy eyes against Admetus' will.
And now I'm feasting in the house a guest,
Some reckless thief or robber, and she's gone
Forth from the house, and I've not followed her,
Nor stretched to her my hand with loud lament

For our loved mistress, who to me and all
Her household ever filled a mother's part.
For she preserved us from a thousand blames,
Softening the angry temper of her spouse.
Do I not then, with justice hate this guest,
Coming amongst us in our grievous case?

HERACLES.

Ho, there ! why hast thou such a solemn look ?
It ill befits a servant to display
Moroseness towards a guest, but with a look
Of welcome should he ever be received.
But thou, when comes a comrade of thy lord,
Receivest him with face o'erspread with gloom,
And knitted brows, and making much ado
About a loss that no way touches thee.
Come hither, and thou shalt the wiser be.
Know'st thou the turn that mortal things do take ?
I think not,—for how shouldst thou ? But attend,
Death is a debt which every man doth owe,
And none there is who knows if he shall live
All through the coming day ; for 'tis not clear
Whither the course of fortune will proceed,
Nor is it to be taught, or found by art.
Hearing this, then, and learning it from me,
Gladden thyself and drink, and day by day
Reckon thy life thy own, and all the rest
At fortune's beck, and honour her the most,

Cypris, the pleasantest of gods to men ;
(For gracious is the goddess), and these things
Leave, and believe my words, if I do seem
To speak aright ;—I think so, certainly.
Wilt thou not, then, dismiss thy too great grief,
And drink with us, advancing through these gates
Crowned with thick garlands? and I know right well
The plashing of the wine upon the cup
Will chase away thy sullenness of mind.
But it is fitting mortal men should dwell
On mortal things, since life to men of gloom
And knitted brows is not in truth a life,
But a calamity, if I'm a judge.

ATTENDANT.

We know all this, but now we have in hand
A work that fits not in with revelling
And laughter.

HERACLES.

She's a stranger who is dead,
Don't mourn too much, for they who rule this house
Are living.

ATTENDANT.

What, are living? know'st thou not
The ill fortune of this house?

HERACLES.

Yes, I do know,
Unless thy master's somehow led me wrong.

ATTENDANT.

His failing is to love too much his guest.

HERACLES.

Ought I not to have found fair treatment here,
The dead being but a stranger?

ATTENDANT.

Very much

A stranger was she truly !

HERACLES.

Was there, then,

Some mishap with him that he told not of?

ATTENDANT.

Go thou and prosper ! Our concern is with
Our lord's misfortunes.

HERACLES.

This discourse speaks not
Of outside sufferings.

ATTENDANT.

No ! for then to see
Thee revelling had not grieved me.

HERACLES.

Can it be
That I have got injustice from my host?

ATTENDANT.

Thou camest when it was no fitting time
To lodge thee in the house, for we do mourn.
Thou seest our shorn locks and cloaks of black.

HERACLES.

Who is it that is dead? A child of his,
Or has his aged father gone away?

ATTENDANT

Admetus' wife, O stranger, then is dead.

HERACLES.

What say'st thou? Did ye, then, in spite of this,
Receive me as a guest?

ATTENDANT.

He thought it shame
To send thee from his house.

HERACLES.

O ill-starred man!
How excellent a partner hast thou lost!

ATTENDANT,

We all have suffered loss, not he alone.

HERACLES.

I knew it when I saw his streaming eyes,
Shorn locks, and dismal face, but I was made
To think that he was bearing to the tomb
The corpse of one not near of kin to him.
And passing through these gates against my will
I drank in this man's hospitable house,
And he in such a case. And did I dare
To revel, wearing garlands on my head?

But yet the fault was thine, who told me not
That such misfortune pressed upon this house.
But where will be her burial? How shall I
Go forth to find him?

ATTENDANT.

By the public path
That leads straight to Larissa, thou shalt see
A polished tomb, beyond the city's bounds.

HERACLES.

O much enduring heart and soul of mine,
Now show what kind of son Alcmene bore
To Zeus (of Tiryns she, Electryon's child),
For I must save this lady lately dead,
And bring again Alcestis to this house,
And send much joy into Admetus' heart.
And going, I will seek this black-robed king
Who rules the dead, this Thanatos, and him
I hope to find no long way from the tomb
Quaffing the sacred blood; and if I rush
Out of my ambush and get hold of him,
And clasp him in my arms, there is no one
Shall take him from me, though he labour sore
Before he gives the woman up to me.
But if I miss my prize, he coming not
Near to the clotted blood, I then will go
Down to the sunless dwellings of the bride

And of her lord, and make demand for her.
And I have confidence that I shall bring
Alcestis up, and place her in the arms
Of him who took me in, nor sent me off,
Though bowed beneath misfortune's heavy stroke.
But he concealed it in his nobleness,
Out of respect for me. Of those who dwell
In Thessaly, what man does more regard
The stranger guest? What dweller in the land
Of Hellas? Therefore shall it not be said,
He did a kindness to a mean-souled man,
Himself of noble blood.

ADMETUS.

Alas, alas !

O hateful funeral train ! O hateful sight
Of widowed chambers ! Ah, woe, woe is me !
To what place shall I go ? Where stand ? What say ?
And what not say ? O would that I were dead !
Surely, 'twas for a heavy destiny
My mother gave me birth. I envy those
Who've gone below ; I love them, and I long
To occupy their dwellings. I joy not
To see the light, or tread upon the earth,
Stripped of so sweet a helpmate, whom grim Death
Hath rendered up to Hades.

CHORUS.

On, step on,

And go to the concealment of thy house.

ADMETUS.

Woe, woe !

CHORUS.

Things worthy of such cries of woe
Have been thy portion.

ADMETUS.

Ah !

CHORUS.

Most grievous pain
Hast thou gone through, and that I know right well.

ADMETUS.

Alas, alas !

CHORUS.

But that doth profit not
Her that's beneath.

ADMETUS.

Ah me !

CHORUS.

No more to gaze
On thy loved wife and see her face to face,
Is grief indeed.

ADMETUS.

Thou bringest to my mind
What wounds me sore, for what worse ill can be
Than to be parted from a loving wife ?
Would I had never married her, nor dwelt
Together with her in this house of mine.
I envy the unmarried among men,
And those who have no children ; for their life

Is single, and to grieve for it alone
Is but a moderate burden. But to see
Diseases in one's children, and the bed
Graced by a happy bride laid waste in death,
Is not to be endured, when one may be
Childless, and never take the marriage vow.

CHORUS.

Fate, fate, that's hard to struggle with, is come.

ADMETUS.

Woe, woe !

CHORUS.

Thou putt'st no limit to thy grief.

ADMETUS.

Ah, ah !

CHORUS.

A weight that's heavy to be borne,
But yet—

ADMETUS.

Alas, alas !

CHORUS.

Endure thou it,
Thou'rt not the first who's lost—

ADMETUS.

Ah me, ah me !

CHORUS.

A wife ; but *this* calamity weighs down
One mortal, *that* another, when it comes.

ADMETUS.

O mourning without end, and sorrowing
For dear ones who have gone beneath the earth,
Why did'st thou hinder me, nor let me throw
Myself into the still unclosèd tomb,
And lifeless lie with her who is by far
The best of women? Hades then had had
Two truly faithful souls, instead of one,
Ferried together o'er the lake below.

CHORUS.

There was a man akin to me, whose son,
One much to be lamented, died within
His house, an only child ; but yet he bore
The evil patiently, though he was left
Without a child, and now far on his way
To hoary hairs, and to the verge of life.

ADMETUS.

O semblance of a house, how shall I come ,
Within thy bounds, how can I dwell in thee
With such a change of fortune? Woe is me !
For 'tis another thing. Then, then 'twas mine
To enter it with brands of Pelian pine,
And bridal songs, supporting the loved hand
Of my young wife ; and after us there came
A band of revellers with cheerings loud,
Wishing much joy to her who now lies dead,

And to myself, that, born of gentle blood,
And both of noble parentage, we came
And joined together in the marriage bond.
But now laments instead of bridal hymns,
And cloaks of black instead of raiment white.
Escort me to my desert marriage bed.

CHORUS.

This grief hath lighted on thee all unused
To evil fortune following happier days,
But in it thou hast saved thy life and soul ;
Thy wife has died, and left behind for thee
A fond remembrance. What is new in this ?
Death hath already taken many a wife.

ADMETUS.

Friends, I account the fortune of my wife
More happy than my own, though it seems not so.
For pain and grief will never touch her more,
And with fair fame her many troubles end ;
But I who have no right to live, who've passed
My fated time, shall lead a life of pain.
Just now have I discovered it, for how
Shall I endure to come within these doors ?
Whom greeting, and by whom addressed in turn,
Shall I feel pleasing welcome when I come ?
O whither shall I turn ? The loneliness
That reigns within will drive me out again,

Whenever I look on the empty bed,
Where slept my wife, the seats on which she sat,
The chamber's squalid floor, and see, (sad sight !)
My children falling on my knees with wail
For their lost mother, and the servants all
Mourning for such a mistress as has gone.
Such scenes will be within, and out of doors
The weddings of Thessalians, and the crowd
Of women in their midst will drive me off.
For never will I bear to look upon
The compeers of my wife, and he who is
My enemy will speak such words as these ;
“ This is the man who lives but on his shame,
Who did not dare to die, but gave instead
Her whom he married, in his cowardice
Fleeing from Hades, and still does he dare
To call himself a man ? But he does hate
His parents, though objecting much himself
To go below.” Such ill-name shall I have
Beside my heavy loss ! What profits it,
My friends, that I should live, then, I who am
Ill-spoken of, ill-faring every way.

CHORUS.

I to the muses have applied myself,
And lofty speculations, and have known
The reasonings of many learned men,
But never have I found a thing so strong

As stern necessity, nor ought to cope
With *it* in Thracian tablets once inscribed
From voice of Orpheus, nor in remedies
Which Phœbus gave to Æsculapius' sons,
Dispensing healing to much-suffering man.
But of this goddess only, may none come
And sit before her altar, or her form
In wood or stone, for no regard has she
For sacrificial gifts. O may'st thou not,
Dread goddess, come to me with greater force
Than in my former life ! For e'en what Zeus
Assents to, he accomplishes with thee.
And with thy might thou conquerest the steel
Found 'mongst the Chalybes, nor is there one
Can hope to bend thy most relentless will.
And in her bonds, that are not to be shunned,
The goddess holds thee fast. Submit thou, then,
For never wilt thou bring up with thy tears
Those who have perished, from the realm beneath.
Even the children of the secret loves
Of the high gods must die. Most dear was she
While she was with us, and she is still dear
Though dead. And thou didst bring unto thy bed
A wife the noblest of all woman kind.
Let not her tomb be counted as a mound
O'er one that's perished, but let her be held
In honour like the gods, and revered
By every wayfarer. And one will say

Who chances to ascend the sloping path,
“This lady gave her life in time gone by
To save from doom her husband. Now is she
A blessed goddess. Hail, O honoured one,
Grant that we now may prosper!” Such will be
The words that greet her. And in truth here comes
Alcmene’s son, Admetus, to thy hearth
As it appears.

HERACLES.

Admetus, it is fit
To speak with freedom to the man one loves,
And not, restraining words, to keep reproach
Within one’s bosom. And I thought it right
Chancing upon thee in thy wretchedness,
To prove myself thy friend. But nought said’st thou
Of thy wife lying dead. But in thy house
Thou gav’st me entertainment, seemingly
Busied about a loss that was not thine ;
And I my head with garlands crowned, and poured
Libations to the gods within a house
So full of misery. And I blame, indeed,
I blame thy treatment, but I would not add
Ought to thy wretchedness. But let me tell
Why I have come, returning back again.
Take thou and tend this woman while I go
And bring the Thracian horses back with me,
First slaying him who rules Bistonian men.

But should that happen which I would not have,
(For strong my hope to prosper), I do give
This woman to attend thee in thy house ;
But with much toil she came into my hands.
For I found some appointing athletes' games,
Open to all, and worthy the attempt,
And thence I bring her who was given to me
A prize for victory ; for 'twas allowed
To those who conquered in the lesser games
To bear off horses, and to those who won
The greater, (wrestlers and the pugilists),
A prize of cattle, and the woman went
Along with them, and it was counted base
For one who won the prize to pass her by,
So honourably gained. But as I said,
This woman must needs be a care to thee.
For not by theft, but with much heavy toil
She came into my hands, and by-and-by
Thou, too, perhaps wilt see I have done well.

ADMETUS.

Not out of disrespect for thee, nor that
I counted thee an enemy, did I
Conceal the wretched fortune of my wife.
But 'twould have been another added grief,
If thou hadst hurried from my house away
To share some other's hospitable board.
But 'twas enough for me to have to mourn

My own misfortune. I beseech thee, prince,
'Mong the Thessalians bid some other man
Who has not gone through sufferings such as mine
To tend this woman, if it can be so.
And many men of Pheræ are thy friends ;
O do not make my sufferings live again.
I could not keep from weeping, seeing her
Within my house. O do not add disease
To one diseased ; enough am I weighed down
By my calamity. In what part, too,
Of this abode of mine should one be lodged
So young ? For that she's young is plainly shown
By her adornments and her vesture, too.
Must she, then, occupy a room with men ?
And how can she unsullied long remain
So mixed up with young men ? 'Tis hard to check,
O Heracles, the ardour of young blood.
Thou seest my forethought for thy own behoof.
Or, must I lodge her in the room of her
Who's dead ? How can I bring her to the couch
Where slept Alcestis ? Double blame I dread,
Both from the people, lest there be who say
I was untrue to her who saved my life,
To fall into another girl's embrace ;
And it behoves me to have much regard
For her who's gone, and she in truth deserves
My utmost reverence. But, O lady, know,

Whoe'er thou art, thou hast the very look
And figure of Alcestis. Woe is me !
Take, by the gods, this woman from my sight,
Nor ruin one already sore bestead.
For seeing her, I seem to see my wife ;
My heart is troubled, and from out my eyes
Fountains burst forth. O miserable me !
How is my cup of bitter sorrow full !

CHORUS.

I indeed have not much that's good to say
Of fortune, but 'tis needful to bear well
What God dispenses, be it what it may.

HERACLES.

Would that I had the power to bring again
Thy wife to daylight from the abodes below,
And gratify thy soul with such a boon !

ADMETUS.

I know thou hast the will ; but what means this ?
It is not in the power of the dead
To come up to the light.

HERACLES.

Do thou not then
Go to excess, but bear it as thou should'st.

ADMETUS.

'Tis easier to advise than to endure
Our ills with patience.

HERACLES.

But what would'st thou gain
If thou wert always uttering thy moans?

ADMETUS.

I myself know it, but a longing strange
To indulge in sorrow takes me past myself.

HERACLES.

It is so, for remembrance of the dead
Calls forth a tear.

ADMETUS.

She has undone me more
Than I can tell.

HERACLES.

Thou hast lost indeed a wife
Most virtuous ; who can say she is not so?

ADMETUS.

So that the man before thee shares no more
The joys of life.

HERACLES.

But time will heal thy grief,
For now thy ill is still but in its youth.

ADMETUS.

Time thou mayst speak of, if thou mean'st by this
The time to die.

HERACLES.

A woman, and the wish
For a new marriage will assuage thy grief.

ADMETUS.

Hold ! what is that thou say'st ? Such thought as that
Be far from me !

HERACLES.

But why ? For wilt thou not
Marry again, but rather love the bed
Of widowed solitude ?

ADMETUS.

There is no one
Of womankind who shall repose with me.

HERACLES.

Dost thou then think to benefit the dead ?

ADMETUS.

'Tis meet that she be honoured wheresoe'er
She chance to be.

HERACLES.

True, true, but thou may'st still
Be charged with folly.

ADMETUS.

Say thou'lt never call
This man a bridegroom.

HERACLES.

I commend thee that
Thou art a friend most faithful to thy wife.

ADMETUS.

May I die now, if I be false to her
Though she exists not.

HERACLES.

Take this woman now
Into thy noble halls.

ADMETUS.

O ask it not
By Zeus thy sire, I pray thee.

HERACLES.

Thou wilt err,
Not doing it.

ADMETUS.

And doing it my heart
Will be much pained.

HERACLES.

Consent, for soon perchance
This favour may receive fit recompense.

ADMETUS.

Oh how I wish she ne'er had been thy prize
Won in the games !

HERACLES.

And yet thou hast a share
With me in victory.

ADMETUS.

Thou hast spoken fair,
But let the woman still depart from me.

HERACLES.

She *shall* depart if it is fit, but first
Think well about it whether it *is* fit.

ADMETUS.

It is fit if thou'lt not be angry with me.

HERACLES.

I also, knowing something, wish to have
My way.

ADMETUS.

Then be it so, but what thou doest
Is no way pleasing to me.

HERACLES.

But some day
Thou wilt approve my conduct, only yield !

ADMETUS.

Bring her then, if she needs must be received
Within my house.

HERACLES.

I would not have her left
With thy attendants.

ADMETUS.

Take her then thyself
Into my house if it seems good to thee.

HERACLES.

Then will I bring and place her in thy arms.

ADMETUS.

I will not touch her, yet she may be brought
Into my house.

HERACLES.

I trust in thy right hand
Alone.

ADMETUS.

Thou forcest me, O prince, to do
These things against my will.

HERACLES.

Have courage then
To extend thy hand and touch thy stranger guest.

ADMETUS.

Well then, I stretch it forth as I would touch
A headless Gorgon.

HERACLES.

Hast thou her?

ADMETUS.

I have.

HERACLES.

Well then, take care of her and thou wilt say
The son of Zeus has been a noble guest.
Look on her, see if she in aught is like
To thy lost wife, and in thy joy forget
Thy sorrow.

ADMETUS.

O ye gods, what shall I say?

This is a most unhoped for miracle.
Do I in truth see in this woman here
My own loved wife, or does some mocking joy
Godsent confound my senses?

HERACLES.

'Tis not so,

But in this woman thou dost see thy wife.

ADMETUS.

See that she be no phantasm of the dead.

HERACLES.

He whom thou mad'st thy friend can have no claim
To be a necromancer.

ADMETUS.

Do I then

Behold my wife whom I so late entombed ?

HERACLES.

Assuredly, and yet I wonder not
At thy distrust of fortune.

ADMETUS.

May I touch,

And speak to her as my own living wife ?

HERACLES.

Speak to her, for thou hast thy heart's desire.

ADMETUS.

O eyes and figure of a wife most dear,
I have thee all unlooked for, for no hope
Cheered me that I should ever see thee more.

HERACLES.

Thou hast her ; may no envy of the gods
Light on thee !

ADMETUS.

O thou noble son of Zeus,
The mightiest, may'st thou prosper in thy way,

And may the father who begat thee, guard
Thee ever ! For 'tis thou alone hast raised
My fortunes. How then didst thou send her up
From underneath into the light of day ?

HERACLES.

After a fight with him who is the lord
Of life and death.

ADMETUS.

Where saidst thou, thou didst have
This wrestling match with death ?

HERACLES.

Beside the tomb,
Seizing him from an ambush with my hands.

ADMETUS.

But why all speechless stands the woman here ?

HERACLES.

It may not be that thou should'st hear her voice
Before with offerings to the gods beneath
She's purified herself, and light from heaven
Three times hath dawned. But take her now within,
And being henceforth just, Admetus, give
Due honour to thy guests. And now farewell !
I go to do the work set out for me,
To serve the royal son of Sthenelus.

ADMETUS.

Stay with us, and partake thou of our hearth !

HERACLES.

Hereafter it shall be, but now I needs
Must haste away.

ADMETUS.

Then may'st thou have success,
And may'st thou come here with returning step !
And all the citizens will I command,
And tetrarchs, with the dance to celebrate
This happy issue, and the temples fill
With sacrificial prayers. For now our life
Is changed to better than it was before ;
And that I'm fortunate I'll not deny.

CHORUS.

Many and varied are the forms of fate,
And many things unlooked for do the gods
Perform, and that which was expected fails
Fulfilment, but the gods have found a way
To bring to pass the things that none expect.
In such a way has this affair turned out.



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